ABSTRACT

Orthographic Reform and Language Planning in Russian History

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An oft-neglected topic of book history and culture, both in histories of writing development and in cultural histories of Russia and Eastern Europe, is the rich history of orthographic reform and language planning in Russian and Slavic history. Even more neglected are the cultural, religious, and political drivers of language planning and the relationship of identity to writing systems. This thesis aims to correct this oversight by synthesizing histories on the development of written Russian until its codification by Peter the Great in the early 18th century as well as the language reforms accomplished under the Bolsheviks in the 20th century. It will present analysis on motivations for these two periods of language reform as well as impulses behind resistance thereof; the resulting evidence will demonstrate the close ties of political and cultural, particularly religious, identity to the use of written systems as illustrated by the relationship of Eastern Orthodoxy to the Cyrillic alphabet.

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ORTHOGRAPHIC REFORM AND LANGUAGE PLANNING IN RUSSIAN HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

> Язык — религия: правописание — святой обряд ее. Как небо над землей, должно быть в воспитании дано детям ощущение не нами созданных просторов духа.
>
> Валериан Чудовский[1]
>
> Language is a religion: spelling is her holy rite. Just as the sky is above the earth, so should children be given a taste of the vastness of that spirit which we did not create.
>
> Valerian Chudovsky

These words come from a 1917 publication of the Acmeist journal *Apollon*, in which Valerian Chudovsky, the Imperial Public Library head of fine arts and technology, delivered an impassioned monograph detailing the virtues of a specific Russian letter: Ѣ (*yat'*). Russia was in the throes of a revolution: the Tsar had recently abdicated the throne, competing parties vied for control of Moscow, and the future of the former empire was all but uncertain – seemingly an inappropriate time to publicly declare love for a member of the alphabet. There was, however, another, smaller revolution in the making – for decades, academics and educators had advocated for radical spelling reform that Imperial authority had dismissed. With the chaos of revolution also came an opportunity for reformists to bring their concerns to prominent revolutionaries. The letter *yat'* was among a number of letters facing the chopping block.

Even still, it is difficult to imagine the circumstance under which a person would feel drawn to defend a letter so ardently. In his piece, Chudovsky aligns

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[1] Adapted to reformed orthography; translation mine.

language and the alphabet with spirituality; he argues that orthodoxy of the Russian language demands a commitment to the rules of its spelling, and that Cyrillic is not man-made but rather crafted with a spirit which God gifted to their ancestors. As such, he insists it should not be tampered with or altered, and it is the duty of Russian elders to preserve it in its entirety for future generations. To understand and appreciate Chudovsky's concern requires a familiarity with centuries of Russian language history – more specifically, a familiarity with the history of its orthography.

***

Russia boasts a rich history of orthographic reform and language planning which spans hundreds of years. There are two primary periods of activity that dominate Russia's cultural and political history of orthography; Peter the Great was responsible for the first in the earliest years of the eighteenth century, and the communist authorities for the second period starting at the 1917 October Revolution. These two eras of reform, though the products of ideologically and structurally obverse governments, share numerous similarities. While scholars do not neglect the topic of Russian orthographic reform itself, there are few, if any, authoritative works in English which discuss the cultural, religious, and political drivers common to both eras of Russian language planning, and fewer still which grapple with the implications of those motivations with regard to the link between identity and script.

This thesis aims to correct this oversight by synthesizing scholarship on the development of written Russian until its codification by Peter the Great in the early eighteenth century as well as the language reforms accomplished under the

Bolsheviks in the twentieth century. It will present analysis on motivations for these two periods of language reform as well as impulses behind resistance thereof; the resulting evidence will demonstrate the powerful connection between political and cultural – particularly religious – identity to the use of written systems, as illustrated by the relationship of Eastern Orthodoxy to the Cyrillic alphabet.

The theoretical foundation of this thesis comes primarily from Benedict Anderson's work on nationalism and identity formation. His theories of languages of power and imagined communities are critical to this work's interpretation of Russian history. This thesis also depends on works concerning the role of orthography role in social change and identity that informed the connection between power, identity, and orthography; these include Erica Mary Boeckler's work *Playful Letters: A Study in Early Modern Alphabetics*, Neil Bermel's book on the Czech orthography wars, and Alexandra M. Jaffe's work on orthography as social action.

This thesis joins a diverse body of work on Russian intellectual and linguistic history and the politics thereof. Particularly notable for information on the Petrine era are Peter Cracraft's definitive work on the Petrine Revolution, A. P. Vlasto's survey of Russian linguistic history to the eighteenth century, and Gary Marker's work on book culture in eighteenth century Russia. The works that informed the conversation on Russian language policy in the twentieth century include Grenoble's work on Soviet language policy, Bernard Comrie's text on Russian language in the twentieth century, and Eugenia Sokolskaya's work on the orthographic reform's impact on social change.

It is difficult to find fault with James Cracraft's discussion of the orthographic reforms and advances in print culture in *The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture*. In his chapter on 'the language question', Cracraft places the Russian print revolution in context with western Europe and the orthographic reforms in the context of print efficiency. His analysis is primarily restricted to Peter's use of language policy to craft a mechanism for rule, however, he also introduces Benedict Anderson's theory of languages of power and imagined communities to the conversation on Russian language policy, concepts upon which this thesis relies heavily.

A Linguistic History of Russia to the End of the Eighteenth Century by A. P. Vlasto offers an overview of the evolution of the Russian language from its roots in common Slavic; Vlasto presents no analysis. Gary Marker's *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of Russian Intellectual Life, 1700-1800*, on the other hand, focuses entirely on analysis of print culture in Russian society writ large, mentioning orthography only as it related to secularization.

Lenore A. Grenoble's *Language Policy in the Soviet Union* places Russian orthographic reform in the context of language policy across the Soviet Union and the political motivations behind their implementation – however, the book gives very little time to the question of identity and religion. Bernard Comrie and Gerald Stone's contribution, *The Russian Language in the Twentieth Century*, offers another perspective on orthographic reform that delves more into the specific actions of its foot soldiers. Comrie & Stone focus entirely on the linguistic function of the alphabet as it related to both motivations and outcomes of the reform. Evgenia Sokolskaya's *Seize the Ѣ: Linguistic and Social Change in*

Russian Orthographic Reform is the first of these to draw a connection between the Petrine and Soviet reforms. Despite outlining major similarities between the two periods, however, Sokolskaya neglects to offer analysis on the orthography's part in Russian identity.

This thesis aims to bring together the fruits of these scholars' labor and offer a comparative history of language planning in the Petrine and Soviet periods. It is not exhaustive; this work strives to be accessible to readers without a background in either linguistics or Russian history and offer a concise analysis of common themes in these two periods and their consequences for Russian culture and identity.

The first chapter concerns the Petrine era orthographic reforms. It begins by offering context in the way of a brief history of the Russian alphabet and written culture up until Peter the Great's arrival to the stage in the late seventeenth century; it discusses the methods by which the Tsar implemented his reforms, as well as his motivations for them. It then details the ways that Peter wrought influence over Russia's political, linguistic, and cultural spheres with the implementation of his language planning policies.

The second chapter offers a similar account of the twentieth century reforms primarily carried out by communist revolutionaries in post-Tsarist Russian territory. This chapter elaborates on the ways that communist authorities carried out language reform and deals particularly with their motivations to eliminate illiteracy and develop a cohesive Soviet identity in the multiethnic emergent Soviet Union.

Lastly, the third chapter discusses reasons for and methods of rejection of orthographic reform in Russia and abroad. It focuses on available evidence from the twentieth century including periodicals and émigré publications outside of the Soviet Union to construct an argument that opposition to the orthographic reforms came primarily from a question of identity. It thus demonstrates the strong connection between cultural and political identity to orthographic choices, arguing that orthography is an interface of language that facilitates the construction of an *imagined community*, providing a means for uniting and controlling users. This work then concludes with thoughts on the future trajectory of this research and unanswered questions regarding identity and script choice.

CHAPTER ONE

Peter I and the Rise of Russian Print Culture

Under Peter the Great from 1700 until his death in 1725, orthography underwent a literal reformation when Tsar Peter eliminated some and reshaped other characters of the Cyrillic alphabet. These reforms buttressed Peter I's overall goal of making Russia a world power in order to catch up with the West. To that end, Russia's administration under Peter I aimed to centralize power and needed to develop a professional population, promote cultural revitalization, and minimize the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on the state. The orthographic reforms of the period bolstered these changes by fostering a standard written language which allowed citizens control of an apparatus of civil advancement: their own language. This chapter will cover the methods, motivations, and outcomes of the Petrine language planning policies and orthographic reforms.

Background

At least two main scripts existed up until Peter's intervention in the eighteenth century: the Slavonic script and chancery Russian[1], which was not codified. In both cases, the retention of archaic Slavonic grammatical forms in the written language had slowed verbal development in Russian for centuries; they were obsolete in Slavic vernaculars, and Cracraft asserts that neither

[1] *Приказный язык*; the language of government and business.

Moscow chancery Russian nor Church Slavonic were suitable as a “language of power” (Cracraft 2004). He borrows this term from Benedict Anderson’s definitive work on the shaping of nationalism (Anderson 1991) to mean a dialect of a language which is stable, often as a result of the advent of mechanical reproduction, that garners prestige and unifies a people under an imagined identity. Anderson’s theory is that the common written language coerces users to consider themselves part of the same community in spite of speaking different dialects. Chancery Russian lacked the standardization to operate as such a language, and Slavonic did not reflect the spoken language; both were therefore unsuitable as a mechanism for rule.

Chancery Russian existed on a graded cline from Slavonic with some spoken Russian phrases grafted in, to clumsily transcribed Russian (Cracraft 2004). The multitude of styles constituting chancery Russian were based on the Moscow dialect which the center of power imposed on all Rus’ territory. These scripts had no standardization and therefore did not require a grammar; by the time of Peter the Great they had become archaic. Chancery Russian scripts featured a combination of semi-uncial Slavonic Cyrillic and cursive from Ruthenian lands. Even Muscovite chancery became too rigid for use by the end of the 16th century.

It is important here to note that Church Slavonic was never a spoken tongue. Saints Cyril and Methodius developed the Glagolitic alphabet to serve as the first written medium for Common Slavic, based on the Macedonian dialect with which they were familiar (Vlasto 1986). In the tenth century Cyrillo-Methodian pupils adapted it into the Cyrillic alphabet; Cyrillic used mostly Greek

letters, with Glagolitic characters for sounds unique to Slavic dialects (Lunt 2001). Old Church Slavonic is the name academics give to this early artificial language written with Cyrillic letters; while its developers based it on Slavic dialects, it never reflected any actual spoken language. Clergy developed Church Slavonic to translate the Bible and theological works into Slavic languages.

Slavonic featured influences from Greek in vocabulary and syntax but took on local color as Slavic people adopted it broadly and adapted it to suit their native dialects. Macedo-Bulgarian preeminence among Slavs as a center for administration ensured that local conventions of Bulgarian Church Slavonic remained standard throughout Slavic territories (Sussex and Cubberley 2011); by the late tenth century the language of Old Church Slavonic had a standard 'correct' pronunciation that did not correspond to any natural spoken languages extant at the time, particularly not the East Slavic dialects which would give rise to the Russian language (Vlasto 1986).

Church Slavonic, even when colored with local peculiarities, featured a much more abstract, elevated, and formal lexicon than spoken dialects of Slavic. As Kievan Rus' was not a centralized territory, disparate local conventions were unobtrusive, but the emergence of Muscovy made glaring the need for a central standard. As Old Church Slavonic evolved into Russian Church Slavonic, the written language affected the spoken language only in terms of lexicon (Vlasto 1986), adding ecclesiastic terms. The standard language[2] developed after 1500 with a period of what Vlasto calls "deliberate bilingualism"; that is to say that the

[2] деловой язык - the language of use.

Church deliberately curated and monitored use of Slavonic according to fixed rules and enforced the dichotomy between the commonly spoken dialect and the Church language.

In conclusion, by the end of the seventeenth century the written systems available to Russians were florid in excess, reflective of long-discarded grammatical structures, and available only to clergy and select administrators. Peter's task was to renovate and standardize the written system in reflection of the Russian people's language.

Reforms

Peter the Great began sole rulership of Russia in 1696 and brought with him his Western European educational background. A student of shipbuilding and culture in the Netherlands and England, he noted the vast differences between the economic development of Russia versus that of Western Europe, as well as the disparity in cultural development. Today, historians remember Peter I for bringing Russia into the modern world, revolutionizing the economic and political systems, establishing a navy, secularization, and conforming Russian aristocratic society to Western culture and distinguishing the aristocracy from the peasantry. While historians often treat his language planning policy separately from these other achievements, none of them would have been feasible without his linguistic policies and reform of the alphabet.

Peter conducted a massive overhaul of the alphabet. His reforms spanned design of letters to the adoption of the Arabic numeral system. He commissioned Dutch typographer Jan Tessing to redesign the Cyrillic alphabet and thus began

his print revolution (Zhivov 2009). Specifically, he reduced the number of Cyrillic letters in Russian from 45 to 38, eliminated the majority of diacritics, and enhanced the readability of standard type by aligning Cyrillic letters with the forms of Western models. Prior to Peter's reform the alphabet contained letters between which the only distinction was position within the word, as spaces between words were not used. Peter's standardization of word spaces made such doublets obsolete.

Peter addressed the instability of form and number of letters and remade Russian literary culture in the image of the west, elevating the prestige of the Russian language. To the end of making room for translation into Russian, he began a program of linguistic importation and innovation to add new words to the Russian lexicon and replaced the Slavonic numeral system with the Arabic system (Cracraft 2004); the first was derived from Cyrillic characters and operated differently. When he did not assign numerals to his new civil alphabet letters, he implicitly enforced the use of Arabic numerals along with the new orthographic system.

Additionally, Peter established paper mills for the state in order to increase the amount of printed material in Russia – as well as increase the monarch's control over printed material (Cracraft 2004). Peter imposed a print monopoly in 1700 giving exclusive printing rights to Jan Tessing and instituted penalties for trafficking printed materials from other (foreign) printers, so that all books be printed through Tessing's presses in Amsterdam until 1715 (Cracraft 2004). The print monopoly did not extend to the printing of any materials in Slavonic, which the church would print in Moscow; he issued a decree that clergy

would exclusively retain traditional Cyrillic fonts, including the Slavonic numeral system, for 'church books' under the supervision of the Holy Synod after 1721 (Cracraft 2004). He included a clause requiring that all printing had to glorify the Tsar and Russia, further controlling printed Russian usage and centralizing power. Peter sought to attain state-owned printing presses in order to publish material independent of the Church and control the dissemination of information

Left*: Pre-Petrine Cyrillic alphabet.* Right*: Opening page of an Old Church Slavonic edition of the Gospels.*

in the empire.

In addition to creating a civil script and laying the groundwork for Russia's print revolution, Peter instituted reforms which undercut the Church's hegemony over language in culture; essentially, he made the Church a department of the

state[3] (Cracraft 2004). He enacted censorship laws which further limited the power of ecclesiastical authors. Specifically, his laws forbade monks from having personal paper and pen in their cells and required all printed material from the ecclesiastical collegium to have the approval of the Synod, which was under the authority of the monarch as a body of the state. By bringing the Church under the authority of the monarch, by creating the civil script which distanced the holiness of the written language, and by limiting printing rights of the clerical population, Peter ensured his sole sovereignty without religious competition.

Motivations

Peter's programs during his reign reflect the goals of westernization, elevation of Russia to a world power, and centralization of power under the monarch. In order to attain these goals in his empire, he needed to develop a professional population, enact cultural revitalization, and secularize Russia's government. All of these tasks hinged on the increase of literacy.

Peter I considered historic adherence to Church Slavonic written conventions to have stunted the development of the Russian language; several alphabets were in circulation at once, with no consistency in selection of letters or rules of spelling. As previously noted, there were a number of characters that no longer corresponded to extant phonemes, some of which were only in circulation for their numeric value (Cracraft 2009), and some doublets existed only to

[3] The Most Holy Synod replaced the Patriarchate of Moscow. This new body had clerical members which the Tsar appointed in order to diminish the Patriarch's influence.

distinguish sounds that came at the beginning of words. Furthermore, Slavonic's position as an ecclesiastical script made it unsuitable for translation. It featured a specifically ecclesiastical lexicon and lacked the words which would make translation of nonreligious texts feasible. Without instruction in foreign languages, the working population could not read technical works from the west. The logical conclusion to this problem was to create a written language in which the working class could communicate and conduct business, through which

Peter crossed out undesirable letterforms in his own hand.

cultural artifacts could be transmitted, and which was distinct from the system under the authority of the Church.

Peter's overhaul of the alphabet and efforts in literacy was meant to create a foundation for a Russian professional class, the development of which the

inaccessibility of Western technical works had heretofore hindered; most historically influential technical treatises did not exist in Russian translation (Comrie, Stone, and Polinsky 1996). Without a strong clerical class, Peter the Great needed to develop a professional population that would underpin his plans for economic growth. An impulse for westernization also influenced his decision to eliminate the Slavonic numeral system; European acceptance of the Arabic numeral system began in the sixteenth century along with their printing revolution (Chrisomalis 2010). By conforming to the western norm of numerals, Peter aimed to streamline and facilitate trade between Russia and the west.

Peter observed that the lack of a correspondent Russian literary language had held Russia back from Westernization and therefore, in his eyes, modernization (Comrie, Stone, and Polinsky 1996). Additionally, even Russia's most educated population were not instructed in Russian language use. For these reasons, Peter the Great sought to reform the alphabet as a means of raising Russia's position globally; this promotion served to bolster His larger goal of launching the Russian Empire into the modern world.

Peter attributed all of Russia's economic and political deficiencies to a perceived backwardness of which he found evidence in the empire's underdeveloped secular culture; Peter saw the absence of a rich literary tradition as illustrative of Russia's failure to modernize. For instance, the prominent European languages of the time all had writing systems & *belles lettres* (Comrie, Stone, and Polinsky 1996), so Russia needed a literary language as well to keep pace. As an illustration of how Russian literary culture fared in comparison to European languages, by 1600 only around 100 books had been printed in any

East Slavic variation of Church Slavonic. By comparison 25,000 books had been printed by that time in Paris, 45,000 in Germany, and 10,000 had been printed in England (Cracraft 2004). This enormous disparity highlights the benighted development of Russian print culture relative to other European states, and reflects the lack of a literary culture, a deficiency of the Russian territory that Peter sought to remedy along with his higher priority of increasing the availability of scientific works.

As a result of the strong link between Church Slavonic and the church, Russian territory produced few original works, and those were almost exclusively of some sacred value such as hagiographies and sermons (Marker 1985). Tsar Peter wanted to give Russia a body of national literature, architecture, and creative work such as that which European powers had possessed and curated historically. In his view, 'culture' was whatever aligned the most with Western European standards; by westernizing the script, Peter recrafted a conduit of identity and reshaped what the users thought of themselves.

In an effort to secularize the tsardom and centralize power, Peter decreased the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church by taking control of the written system and publication of information. As missionaries developed and introduced Church Slavonic to the Slavic people as a means of facilitating Christianization via religious text, it was from the very beginning of its history a sacred script and this quality followed it through to Peter's era and even beyond (Lunt 2001). In his reforms with Russian print culture, he successfully diverted power away from the Church to the monarch.

Since Old Church Slavonic was the primary writing system of Russia, there was a functionally diglossic relationship between the sacred language and 'everything else'; Slavonic's primacy moreover meant that the Church controlled the whole sphere of printing in Russia: what material could be published where, what content the state would allow, and so on. Presumably, this control served the additional editorial function of ensuring the purity of Slavonic in printed materials, further ossifying Slavonicisms and stalling Russian verbal development. A state-owned press would both side-step the editorial supervision of the Church and allow for the promotion of secular culture. Previously, Russians had to import paper, which was both expensive and time-consuming, slowing the progression of book culture. Prior to Peter I, Russian tsars had wielded some modest amount of influence over the Russian Orthodox Church. By bringing the Patriarch under the authority of the monarch in matters of administration and print rights, Peter minimized the threat to his sovereignty.

Outcomes

Academics heavily question the extent of Peter's impact on the language (Cracraft 2004). While debate on 'the language question' continued decades after Peter's death, arguments favored writing in Russian over Slavonic due to his influence. Peter's reforms accomplished cultural development by contributing to the body of original Russian literature produced in the centuries after (Cracraft 2004). The print revolution that accompanied Peter's massive language overhaul was a historically necessary precondition for the establishment of a national literary language and a national literature.

Peter's reforms also created a new conception of the spirit of letters and words; whereas previously the sanctity of letters came from their form, Peter redirected concern towards the content of the words they formed. The letters themselves had been inherited as the vessel of a larger faith tradition which saw itself as the direct and only remaining descendant of the true Christian faith – a belief encapsulated in the Third Rome ideology[4]. With the new shape of the alphabet came a reconsideration of the language as a conduit for all information, not merely a vehicle for sanctity.

As Boeckeler observes, "imperial authority governs from afar and depends on representational tools such as the alphabet to act as a proxy in the daily business of imperial transactions." In other words, Peter's government lengthened its reach and commanded its subjects under the authority of bold new letterforms – thus satisfying the conditions for Anderson's "language of power." Amendments to the alphabet historically corresponded with major shifts in governmental authority. Indeed, Peter's work established precedent for the Bolshevik orthographic reforms two centuries later, with which this thesis will contend in the upcoming chapter.

Peter Cracraft says that "neologistical proliferation under Peter plainly was driven by his regime's program of selective and then comprehensive Europeanization." His administration marked Russia's rise to the European stage, and his language policies across his reign correspond with his broader

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[4] After the fall of Constantinople, Orthodox Christians turned to Moscow as the natural center of Eastern Orthodox unity. Even when the Third Rome ideology fell out of primacy in state doctrine, the belief that Russia was the stronghold of the Orthodox faith persisted.

goals of Westernization. Peter's reforms contributed to the development of a professional population because the 'Petrine reading public' had more access to translated works and strengthened correspondence. Polyglossia turned to diglossia, with Slavonic generally for religious texts and Russian for secular.

None of the advances for which Peter I earned fame would have been feasible without his extensive linguistic reforms, least of all without his pioneering orthographic reforms. Because of Peter the Great, Russia's greatly delayed print revolution accelerated as a result of facilitation from standard letter shapes. Print revolution is a necessary precondition for a national literary language, as Cracraft (2004) observes in comparing Russian print culture to that of Western European nations. As evidence of the booming print culture in eighteenth century Russia as a direct result of the institution of Peter's civil type, in the century after his reforms publishers printed roughly 1,500 titles in traditional Cyrillic and about 10,000 in new civil type. Translations were the bulk of secular titles, and the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences printed the majority of secular titles (Cracraft 2009). For the first time Russians even printed original works, and Peter the Great's eighteenth century reforms paved the path for the earliest famed voices of Russian literature and outlined the trajectory for orthographic change in the coming centuries.

CHAPTER TWO

The 20th Century and the Maturation of a Writing System

Two centuries after Peter the Great's reign, the same motivations that drove the Petrine reforms also gave impetus to further reform of the Russian alphabet. While proposals for reform had been in progress long before the October Revolution in 1917, the Bolshevik Party was the real vanguard for their implementation. They adopted the reforms both on their own merit and for their value successfully advancing the former Russian Empire to the level of other world powers. This chapter will cover the methods, motivations, results, and resistance to the orthographic reforms of the twentieth century. For the purpose of clarity, 'Bolshevik' refers to any official program instituted in the time between October (old style[1]) 1917 and 1922, 'Soviet' refers to official programs from 1922 to the fall of the USSR in 1991. The term 'communist' refers to continuity between these two periods.

Background

In the time between Peter the Great and the turn of the twentieth century, Russian literature matured through the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century and its Golden Age in the nineteenth. The distinction between the church and secular scripts had solidified, but literate Russians still felt the religious heritage

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[1] In 1918 Vladimir Lenin signed a decree to switch from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian; the dates 1-13 of February were dropped and Russian went from 31 January to 14 February. Dates before February 14, 1918 are given in the old style of the Julian calendar.

of their alphabet. Furthermore, the great majority of the population of the Russian Empire was still illiterate, and the Empire had failed to attain the level of social and economic advancement that western Europe had. The written language had also not yet become pervasive to the extent that it really functioned as a language of power; while it had made great strides in standardization, simply not enough people in the vast empire shared the written language. The task of reformers in the twentieth century was to obliterate illiteracy entirely to ensure economic advancement and political stability.

Reforms

Even before the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, linguists and teachers of Russian had been advocating reform of the Cyrillic alphabet. However, due to the political upheaval beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, no governmental body had found linguistic reform to be a priority in the face of widespread unrest (Comrie, Stone, and Polinsky 1996). Whereas the Petrine reforms emerged unilaterally from the monarch, the twentieth century orthographic reforms received their support from the bottom up. Educators in Russia led the push for reform as early as the nineteenth century; Russian language teachers of the Pedagogical Society at Moscow University – including renowned linguist Filipp Fedorovich Fortunatov (Cadiot 2008) – wrote to the Academy of Sciences in an effort to reform the writing system.

Their grievances were connected to the obsolescence of certain phonemes; fossilized in the written system, these sounds created problems for those learning to read and write, and the absence of redundant letters would greatly simplify the

writing system. Further, inconsistencies and complications in spelling rules were often arbitrary and relied on conventions which Yakov Karlovich Grot had established in his grammar in the nineteenth century (Cadiot 2008). Educators called out to officials to lend their attention to the issue for a long time before reaching a resolution to their concerns.

In February 1903 the Ministry of National Education denied approval for the consideration of spelling reform. In spite of the Ministry's denial, the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences[2] established a commission to consider spelling reform on April 12, 1904. The commission subsequently decided that reform was prudent and set up a sub-commission under Fortunatov that would oversee the simplification (Comrie, Stone, and Polinsky 1996); the sub-commission published its preliminary report thereafter, to little success.

In 1907 a group of teachers in the Duma wrote to the Academy of Sciences, urging the Academy not to postpone the spelling change as the existing orthography was an obstacle to the spread of literacy; their request had no impact, so in 1910 the sub-commission[3] resumed and in May 1912 published new resolutions[4]. Again, nothing resulted from these recommendations.

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[2] After the October Revolution, the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences was renamed to the Russian Academy of Sciences. Throughout the rest of this text I refer to this body as merely the Academy of Sciences.

[3] *Постановления орфографической подкомиссии* or *Предварительное сообщение орфографической подкомиссии*

[4] See Comrie, Stone, and Polinsky (1996) pg. 286-87 for detailed list of recommendations.

The time was a period of great political upheaval not receptive matters of education reform – revolutionaries were more concerned with matters of military and political strategy than those of education. Political tensions came to a head with the February and October Revolutions of 1917, and the prospects for the success of orthographic reform changed dramatically. After years of negotiation, the Academy of Sciences at last found the official backing it needed to press its reforms forward.

On the eve of governmental revolution, the All-Russian Congress of Teachers of Russian in Secondary Schools met in Moscow from December 27, 1916 to January 4, 1917; there were 2090 members present. This congress addressed a letter to the Academy of Sciences stating that reform could not be put off any longer and that in the face of political upheaval it was critical to eliminate the boundaries to widespread illiteracy. After the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of the provisional government[5] early March 1917, the Academy of Sciences set up yet another commission to examine the spelling question, which later became the Assembly for Considering the Simplification of the Orthography under the leadership of Alexei Shakhmatov. The assembly's proposals of May 11, 1917 eliminated *yat', fita*, word-final hard sign, and single mast *i*.

Eventually the persistence of reform advocates paid off anticlimactically when Department Minister Gerasimov of Popular Education issued a circular on May 17 to schools with details of the reform, which the Ministry of Popular

[5] The provisional government was in place from March until October of 1917. The provisional government was composed of multiple political parties and failed to resolve tensions or establish stability, resulting in its overthrow by the Bolshevik party.

Education confirmed in June with further instructions. The provisional government never made a decision to have reform implemented and support came only from the Ministry of Popular Education to implement changes within schools; it would take a drastic shift in power to revive the project.

The Bolshevik Party plainly understood the power that words and the press held, in general as well as in light of their cause. In the days leading up to their assumption of power, members of the opposing parties exchanged blows by destroying key printing houses of the rival party. It thus comes as no surprise that after the Bolsheviks overthrew the provisional government in October, they subsequently issued the policy of December 23, 1917 in support of reform, establishing a body to oversee its enforcement and began seizing letterforms from printing presses. Anatoly Lunarchesky headed the People's Commissariat of Education and announced that starting January 1, 1918 all government publications and schoolbooks were to be printed in new orthographic standard[6]. The decree specified against retraining those trained under the old system, allowing for a period of transition.

The changes which the decree enforced, as with the Petrine reforms, concerned the elimination of certain letters which were phonetically redundant; in particular, targets for elimination were the letters ѣ (*yat'*), ѳ (*fita*), single-stem i, and word-final ъ (hard sign or mute *yer*). The first three of these were part of three pairs of homophonous graphemes, corresponding exactly in pronunciation with /*е, ф,* and *и*/. Philologists and Russian language teachers considered word-

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[6] Private publications could use whatever convenient, a misspelling only considered such if it violated old and new norms

final mute *yer* to be redundant; the sign signaled a hard ending, which could as easily be signaled with its absence. The decree also outlined new spelling rules which overturned the conventions which Grot established some decades earlier, aiming to create cohesion and consistence within the written language.

The Cyrillic alphabet had up until this time names for all the letters. These names were tied to their sacred origins; as with Hebrew letters, most had a name with a meaning and the words which they formed were holy; the reform abolished the names of alphabet letters. This abolishment constituted separation of the sacred characteristics of letters from their practical purpose.

The orthographic reform accompanied other language policies that centralized linguistic influence. The Bolshevik administration monopolized printing presses in order to ensure success of the new orthography and even had the outlawed letters removed from press type sets and immediately began literacy campaigns across Russian territory, instituting two hours daily of mandated adult education for workers. The Soviet regime was notorious for coining new words with the widespread use of acronyms and instituting policies of linguistic purification and proscription against phrases associated with the monarchy or with capitalism. Some examples of coined words which made it into the English lexicon include *agitprop*[7] and *gulag*[8].

[7] Portmanteau of *agitatsii* and *propagandy*, referring to the department of propaganda

[8] Acronym for Main Administrative Camps (*Главное управление лагерей*).

Additionally, state linguists promoted standardization towards Cyrillic for languages across Soviet territory and used Cyrillic as a model to create written systems for languages without their own. These initiatives were at first based on Lenin's policy self-determinism with the eventual goal of total assimilation; self-determinism meant that educators taught literacy and used local languages, teaching Russian as a second language. Originally, Soviet policy guaranteed education in one's native language. However, after Lenin's death and Joseph Stalin's ascension, in late 20s Stalin further reformed to privilege Russian in an effort to absorb 'backward' cultures and impose a standard across all Soviet territory.

Motivations

Language planning is the sociolinguistic term for implementing policy with the intent to manipulate language use, for instance the Académie française maintaining uniformity and standardization in the French langue. Such manipulation can be useful in preserving or revitalizing a language, such as UNESCO's efforts to preserve indigenous languages. In his text on the Russian language in the communist era, Bernard Comrie quotes linguist Einar Haugen regarding this term: "the language planner's hands are least tied when he can plan a language from the ground up, say in a wholly illiterate society." The Bolsheviks took over a mostly illiterate population and molded literacy as they saw fit. In this instance, the communists used language planning as a tool to build an entirely new society within the boundaries of the former Russian Empire. These reforms reflect the intent on the part of the Bolsheviks to eliminate

illiteracy as an obstacle to modernization economic growth, political stability and identity formation.

Just as Peter the Great viewed language reform as central to nation-building, the communist reformers viewed language planning as critical to the stability of their regime. Many of their motivations in language planning operated in tandem and separating one from another proves difficult. Once again the success of their program depended largely on the elimination – this time the *total* elimination – of illiteracy.

Literacy served as the buttress to the communist goal of westernizing industry; to be precise, their goal was to advance technologically, culturally, and economically to the level that western Europe had achieved. In the view of the communists, illiteracy prevented industrialization, reinforced the lack of accessible literary culture, and served as a roadblock to operating internationally. The Russian territory was majority illiterate; approximately 28.4% Russians were literate before 1900. Only 40.3% men and 16.6% of women were literate. The number was roughly 21% for all of Soviet territory, with literacy rates for ethnic minorities being even lower; 10% of Central Asian men and 3% of Central Asian women were literate (Comrie, Stone, and Polinsky 1996). This pervasive illiteracy highlighted the need for an educated population – which was critical for the communist goal of industrialization.

In order to expedite industrialization, the population needed to be able to read technical works. The Russian Empire was also a multiethnic territory with roughly 130 ethnic groups within its borders and between 150 and 200 languages spoken. By comparison, only thirteen of these languages had writing systems.

To become competitive with Western countries, the Russian population needed to be educated, industrialized, and 'business-savvy'. As in the case of Peter I's reforms, the campaign against illiteracy which the communist authorities promoted sought to raise Russia's status to that of a world power and saw illiteracy as a stumbling-block.

Left: *White Army poster. Note the word-final* ъ, ѣ, *and single-stem* i.

Above: *Red Army poster lacking the offending characters.*

The elimination of illiteracy provided a medium to promote communist ideals; distribution of propaganda became particularly necessary because of the ongoing civil war, wherein the Red and White armies competed with propaganda posters. that portrayed the opposing side as perpetrators of oppression. In the posters below, the Red and White sides blame each other for the hunger of the peasants. The first, a White Army poster, features Vladimir Lenin and key Bolsheviks at a dinner in one panel, captioned with a toast from Lenin: "I drink to those whom we freed from violence and hunger, who were given the opportunity

to see communist paradise." Below it, an image depicts skeletal figures in peasant dress bearing the caption "COMMUNIST PARADISE." In the Red Army poster, similarly skeletal peasants plead with White Army soldiers who set fire to a building. It features the caption, "Falling back before the Red Army, White guards burn bread." Soviet propaganda relied on such posters to disseminate key ideals; this need for propaganda did not end with the Civil War and continued through the Soviet period. The Bolshevik literacy campaigns aimed to offer a path to self-empowerment for the peasantry, which of course included reading material in socialist theory. Such propaganda would feed into the Soviet reforms much later wherein the communist authorities crafted a new Soviet culture as a face to show the world; authorities would commission the creation of new plays, books, films, architecture, music, and visual art.

In order to ensure the feasibility of the communist program, the Bolsheviks realized that minimizing the cost and maximizing the efficiency of printing were key. Reform resulted in the conservation of ink and paper that printers needed and thus made printing cheaper; reprints of Russian classics became several pages shorter with the elimination of word-final *yer*. The absence of extra letters also meant that printers would need fewer resources for metal type, requiring fewer letters to convey the same sounds. The resulting efficiency facilitated propaganda and other printing needs of the communist regime. As an example for how 'behind' Russia was comparatively, in Russia 1899, there was one periodical per 167 thousand people, in Germany one per eight thousand people, and in Michigan one every 2.6 thousand (Kenez, n.d.)

When the Orthodox Church began literacy education in the late nineteenth century, educators placed emphasis on teaching Church Slavonic literacy (Brooks 1985). By overturning this prioritization of Slavonic, communists reinforced the prevalence of written Russian and eliminated the religious element of writing. The further elimination of religion from the writing system through the outlawing of the alphabet letter names also proved advantageous to the communist regime. Such separation would have been convenient for the new Bolshevik regime with their view that religion was 'backwards' and literacy was 'forwards'. What is more, eliminating religiosity from the social fabric of the Russian territory would sever loyalties beyond the party.

Identity formation proved to be one of the most interesting motivations for communist language planning strategies. Propaganda, a common literary canon, and universal Cyrillic served to create an identity distinct from the multiethnic social fabric of the former Russian Empire. Pursuant to developing a unified communist identity, the regime instituted policies of lexical innovation to standardize the new Soviet vocabulary. Later policies of russification would subjugate all local languages to Russian and unify the people under the Russian language and alphabet. War preparation saw another motivation: soldiers needed mutual intelligibility. A common language would facilitate communication and unity on the battlefield.

Results of Soviet Reforms

The dramatic increase in literacy in the Soviet Union proves to be the easiest result to measure. Reported statistics vary, but Grenoble determines that

the rates of literacy began with roughly 20-30% literate before the language reforms and had risen to about 80% by 1939; the rate of literacy in the Soviet Union was nearly one hundred percent by its collapse in 1991 (Grenoble 2003).

Further, policies of Russification broadly account for the increase of fluency in Russian to 97% by the fall of the USSR; prioritization of Russian further marginalized ethnic minorities and such policies led to a huge fall in first language speakers of minority languages. Grenoble argues that the feeling of alienation from ethnic minorities contributed to the dissatisfaction with the USSR; Russification therefore contributed to the downfall of the Soviet Union. In addition to the dramatic increase in Russian literacy, publication rates in Soviet territory shot up. Before 1918, standard language oriented itself to the style which educated Russians spoke; after reform, the standard oriented itself towards the written form (Comrie, Stone, and Polinsky 1996). The reforms resulted in the elimination of illiteracy, a drop in the cost of printing, and the maturation of a conduit for identity-formation.

CHAPTER THREE

Language's Holy Rite

What is it that makes someone identify with a written system? What does a person have to lose by adapting to a new written system? How can this power of orthography be exploited to dictate or direct users' identity? These questions pervade the whole of Russia's history of writing. The relationship of the alphabet to users' conception of community compels those users to defend it in various ways; opposition to orthographic reform in these periods came both implicitly, by merely defaulting to the old system, and explicitly in the form of manifesto-style defenses of traditional orthography.

Central to the resolution of the above questions are some concepts that previous chapters brought to the reader's attention. Language planning describes purposeful control of language to affect control over its use and by extension its users rather than allowing language change to occur organically. A language of power is a stable dialect with enough prestige to unify otherwise disparate people, who then imagine themselves as fraternal with others of varying dialects as part of an imagined community. The construct of the imagined community is particularly important; as orthography is an element of the language of power, it follows that such a community would identify with their script as well. Defense of that script is in a way a defense of their cultural heritage, religion, and even political alignment. Prior to Peter I, Russia had undergone very little in the way of language planning and lacked a language of power. The closest thing Russians

had to a shared language was Old Church Slavonic – which no one spoke and almost no one read. Peter's implementation of language planning policy – most critically his orthographic reforms and strides with the printing press – prepared the ground for the rendering of the Russian identity. Those whose use of the pre-standard orthography had been threatened did rebel, as did later authors who felt nostalgia for old forms. These rebellions were in part because of the wedge that Peter's reforms drove between the Orthodox and Russian identities; by making the reformed script standard, the Tsar effectively lessened the influence of the church on the Russian cultural identity.

Following up on the legacy of Peter the Great, linguists and teachers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries continued to push for further reform of the Russian alphabet and communist enforcement of these reforms politicized an already culturally controversial topic. These reforms constituted another threat to the established tradition of literate Russians – naturally, they pushed back against what they saw as an attack on their cultural identity, their religion, and their values as a Russian people. Emigrants from Russia in this period continued to use pre-reform orthography; for much of the twentieth century, Russia Abroad and the physical territory of Russia operated under two different languages of power with distinct imagined communities.

As a natural result of the constraints which the Petrine era places on the availability of primary documents – not to mention English translations thereof – creating a documentary profile of resistance to reform in the Petrine era is not feasible without extensive time and resources. Regardless, surveys of Russian linguistic history acknowledge opposition from clergy and the general population

of readers; one source goes so far as to say Peter "dragged his unwilling country, and its language" through his reforms (Worth and Flier 1998). Due to these limitations, the rest of this chapter will focus on the evidence from the Soviet era reforms with the assumption that it reflects impulses common to both periods and similar patterns of popular reaction.

The evidence available for opposition to the twentieth century orthographic reforms is both explicit and implicit; numerous writers before and after their implementation drafted arguments against the reforms and vocally opposed them. Likewise, émigré publications as late as the 1950s (and even today!) demonstrate continuance of the old orthographic style. In émigré circles the choice of writing system equated to an announcement of one's political alignment.

Before the implementation of these reforms, the topic was divisive in academic circles – high profile figures such as Lev Tolstoy shared their opinions on the matter (Sokolskaya 2016). Vocal opponents submitted numerous editorials to magazines dramatically condemning the reforms – most particularly the loss of the *yat'*. In his melodramatic treatise against what he viewed as "the mark of a lower civilization," Valerian Chudovsky focuses his attention on this letter. "In Defense of *Yat'*" attacks reformers for turning their back on tradition and cites; his manifesto is particularly interesting for its religious imagery, as he cites the "holy inertia in words" which preserves the Russian philological tradition. He attacks the elimination of *yat'* as sacrilege and calls the letter "a symbol so alive that what it expresses will die by its death." These views echo

Номеръ
12
8 іюня 1924

НАШЪ МІРЪ

Ил... ...рированное
воскр. приложеніе
къ „РУЛЮ“

„Unsere Welt“ • Jllustriertes Sonntagsblatt der russischen demokratischen Tageszeitung „Rul“

БЫТЪ РУССКОЙ ЭМИГРАЦІИ

Въ Берлинскомъ студенческомъ общежитіи въ Tempelhof'ѣ.
Студенты за сапожнымъ ремесломъ.

Направо:
Русскій генералъ Н. съ сыномъ, служащій на Государственномъ чешскомъ конномъ заводѣ въ г. Пискѣ въ Чехословакіи.

Практическая школа русскихъ бѣженцевъ.
Русскіе ученики корзиночной школы въ г. Пискѣ въ Чехословакіи.

Вюнсдорфскій лагерь близъ Берлина.
Б. полковой командиръ съ семьей, за раскрашиваніемъ деревянныхъ чашекъ.

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Cover of Nash Mir, *dated June 8, 1924. Published in Berlin as the Sunday edition of the daily newspaper* Rul'.

what many of their peers thought as well and clearly demonstrate a passionate identification with the pre-reform alphabet.

Following the Bolshevik takeover and subsequent Civil War, Russia experienced its first mass emigration. Literary figures such as Ivan Bunin,

Vladimir Nabokov, and Marina Tsvetaeva took to exile and carried with them their attachment to pre-reform orthography; they even went so far as to refuse to permit the printing of their works in the reformed Cyrillic[1]. Émigré newspapers published in the years after the revolution tended to default to the old system – sometimes as a stance against the Bolsheviks, sometimes as a way to cling to their homeland. As an example, take the above cover from the journal *Nash Mir* (Our World), the illustrated Sunday edition of Berlin-based daily newspaper *Rul'* (Rudder); it features single-stem *i*, the word-final hard sign, and *yat'*. An informed observer could simply glance over the cover and take in the title to know the editors' stance based on the spelling they chose. Such periodicals often circulated among insular groups of like-minded émigrés who shared views on the revolution and its agents.

Many magazines and newspapers clung to the *yat'* in particular as a distinctly Russian shape – globally, while other spelling rules came and went, anti-communist papers consistently used the *yat'* for decades. The *yat'* was, of course, only a stand-in for the attachment to pre-reform orthography. Russian emigrants felt an intense connection to their familiar writing system even those who eventually adopted the reformed alphabet held onto the meaning and sense of self that they identified with the former system. As Marina Tsvetaeva wrote in a letter to a friend, "I use the old orthography now because it is the old me speaking, the one that was, twenty years ago," (Karlinsky 1985). These words

[1] Interestingly, one contemporary publication of Tsvetaeva's verse explicitly honors her request to maintain her choice in orthography even posthumously.

encapsulate a sentiment which many Russian emigrants shared; they felt that their former selves and former lives were connected with their manner of writing.

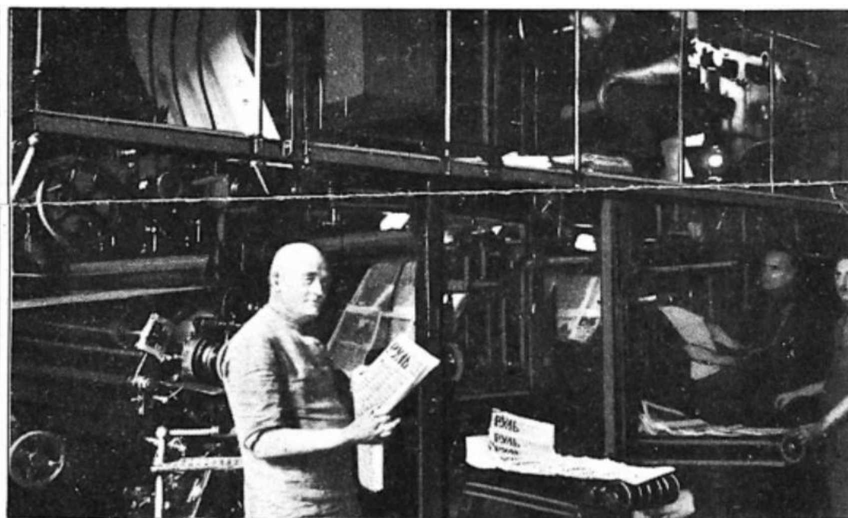
Exiled, many emigrants never bothered to assimilate into their host countries, expecting the Civil War to conclude in their favor so that they could return. They maintained their convention of literary salons which were insular and revolved around periodicals. As exile began to seem permanent, Russian poets and authors continued to use pre-reform conventions and constructed a national identity separate from the physical territory of their homeland. 'Russia Abroad' consisted of these emigrants who believed themselves to be the true Russians – in their minds, the written language was the ark of the Russian culture, and their covenant was the commitment to the 'true' Russian alphabet (Raeff 1990).

Resistance in all its forms – whether political, cultural, or religious – operated in three spheres of social influence. Firstly, the obvious influence of power is encapsulated in conservative rejection of new orthography in order to maintain a small amount of autonomy and control in their lives. Next, opposition came from the influence of community that language crafted for diasporic Russians to connect to one another. Finally, their orthography choice came from how the users saw themselves – as Russians, as Orthodox Christians, as anti-communists, or as some combination of these.

The old orthography was a conduit to their ancestors in the homeland – it placed them in communion with all Russian users past and present. This language of power created an imagined community. They opposed the Soviet

reforms because they undermined the ancient Russian identity which they had crafted.

The move to reform orthography essentially created two Russias with different writing systems. One Russia had claim to the physical homeland and its new government, and 'Russia Abroad' held claim to a theoretical legitimacy that their orthography granted them. Despite being scattered to all corners of the world, users of the old orthography belonged to their own imagined community



Typesetters in a printing house in Berlin for newspaper Rul'.

separate from their homeland. Likewise, despite speaking over one hundred different languages, citizens of the Soviet Union began to participate in the gradual construction of an imagined Soviet community.

Today, the conversation surrounding pre-reform orthography has not ended – but rather than see examples in periodicals, one can find numerous websites that operate exclusively in the old orthography. One such site, *russportal.ru*, declares that the site moderators act "not with an eye on modern Russia, but on the Russia that has passed, along with its language (orthography),

its worldview, its life, its Church." Clearly religion still pervades the choice of script.

Contemporary use of pre-reform elements is also not exclusive to the religiously conservative. Places of business commonly incorporate (often incorrectly) letters such as *yat'* or the word-final hard sign. One can easily see this as a nostalgic element or a ploy to make a place of business seem more legitimate; the presence of such elements, even erroneously, gives the words an 'old-timey' aspect in much the same way that English speakers might incorporate ash (Æ, æ) to create a 'medieval' appearance.

All of this evidence points to an intrinsic connection between identity and script. For some, it may be a lost homeland made tangible or a visual testimony of devotedness to the old values, or perhaps an appeal to nostalgia or fervent opposition to an unpopular authority. These aspects have weight in the conversation around orthography as much as questions of practicality. Scripts are a major part of any language of power, and to change the accepted script is to change the group in power and alter the dominant culture. Opposition to such a change is merely part of a person's expression of self-identity, community connection, and claim to power.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to integrate multiple historical accounts and theories of identity to demonstrate Russia's ever-evolving connection to Cyrillic orthography. Due to limits of time and format, this work did not address certain questions that would greatly contribute to a historical understanding of identity and orthography. It would be worth exploring the responses of Jewish citizens of Russia, who would perhaps not share the popular identification of religion and Cyrillic. Another angle of interrogation could be the responses of exiled revolutionaries who were opposed to the Bolshevik variety of leftism – for instance, how did anarchist Emma Goldman choose to publish her Russian writings abroad? These questions will compose a continuation of the present thesis.

From its inception, the Cyrillic alphabet has been a characteristic feature of the Slavic world. Its development mirrors that of the Russian people; two of the most groundbreaking periods for governmental change also featured reform of the orthographic system. Further, the slow maturation of the Russian writing system ran parallel to the maturation of the Russian identity, with major changes in the orthography immediately preluding the arrival of new literary movements and nationalist movements, and major upsurges in the self-awareness of the Russian people. This is owed in part, of course, to the increase in literacy, but the persistent connection between orthographic evolution and social development remains one of continuous identity formation. Russia's relationship with her

alphabet demonstrates the tie between identity formation and language use. In synthesizing available cultural histories of Russian territory and the Cyrillic alphabet and viewing them through Benedict Anderson's lens of imagined community, it becomes obvious why Valerian Chudovsky would so strongly defend one seemingly humble letter. The motivations for orthographic reform in Russian history reflect the intrinsic power that writing systems hold; public responses to these reforms reveal their role in forming a person's conception of self and establishing a community's sense of interconnection.

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